Dear Editor:

Due to much misinformation on the newly created Contra Costa County's Chief Public Communications Officer, I would like to take this opportunity to present my views on why I support this position.

This position is a neutral, non-political position that can be likened to that of the Legislative Analyst in the State Capitol in Sacramento who has the responsibility of absorbing information from across the Capitol and disseminating it to the public in a neutral and non-political fashion. This role as very important and vital to the state, and I support it for media relations in Contra Costa County. It is distinct from our roles as Supervisors as it pertains strictly to the service operations of the county.

Contra Costa County is a highly vulnerable county with very sensitive levee structures and coast line concerns, refineries, large dams and water storage facilities and highly flammable fuel lines criss-crossing the county. When a disaster occurs, the residents of Contra Costa and media agencies will need direction and information on what to do, where to go, and when to expect relief. The Public Communications Officer will fill that role.

Today the county's issues are framed by the press and in many cases union representatives. While these voices are equally important, the county does not have anyone delivering unbiased information to those that we serve. The county should be able to present factual, non-judgmental information to our citizens so that they can make up their own minds on any given issue.

While we are in the midst of current union negotiations, and will be well into 2006, it is extremely important that the public is highly aware of the very precarious position our county's current and projected financial condition is in. Today, we do not have a voice in that discussion.

We can not hold the county's day-to-day business operations hostage to union negotiations. While union negotiations are important and serious, the business of serving our citizens is our highest priority.

Contra Costa County has grown to over 1 million people. It is one of the most economically, geographically and ethnically diverse counties in California. The county is one of the largest employers in the East Bay with nearly 10,000 employees, a \$1.5 billion budget and 30 operating departments. It is not unreasonable that the taxpayers should have available fast and reliable information about the County, the services it provides and the challenges it faces in a non-partisan, neutral fashion.

MARY N. PIEPHO County Supervisor, District III